

King joins voices to get treatment facility moving ahead

By Mark PavilonsEditor

King is joining colleagues from across York, asking the Province to accelerate approvals for a phosphorus treatment facility. Councillor Avia Eek presented the notice of motion at last week's virtual council meeting. The motion asks the Province to move the Holland Marsh Treatment Facility project ahead, separating it from the broader Upper York Sewage Solutions project. The motion further asks Queen's Park to provide funding for the work. The motion will be circulated to the provincial minister, federal minister, conservation authorities and area MPPs and MPs. Eek's motion contends the facility would potentially serve as an alternative to the stormwater retrofits proposed in the UYSS EA and achieve a higher level of phosphorus removal in the watershed, improving the already beneficial project. The facility would also remove significantly more phosphorus in the Holland River than the stormwater retrofits proposed in the UYSS EA and thereby protect the Lake's watershed from algae growth, resulting in better protection for the watershed's aquatic habitats, increased ecosystem biodiversity and protection of drinking water sources. Mike Rabeau, capital planning and delivery staffer with York Region, provided insights into the big picture. He explained key elements of the UYSS include the water reclamation facility in East Gwillimbury. The entire project has been in the works for years, and remains at the provincial level waiting for approval and an environmental assessment. The EA, he said, was submitted in 2014 and in 2018, York found an opportunity to include phosphorus removal in the Holland Marsh, and put available funds to good use. The Region applied for Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Funding (DMAF). Rabeau pointed out that Holland Marsh facility is contingent on UYSS EA approval, in order to secure the necessary funding. He did point out that York doesn't have jurisdiction over the Holland Marsh. Eek stressed this is an important opportunity to remove phosphorus from the Lake Simcoe watershed. Versions of the motion asking that this critical piece of infrastructure be expedited have now passed in Bradford West Gwillimbury, Georgina, Innisfil, Brock Township, King Township and East Gwillimbury's environment committee, and are pending debate in Orillia and Barrie. Innisfil council unanimously passed the latest motion to move forward the proposed Holland Marsh Phosphorus Recycling Facility. The proposed facility will reduce phosphorus runoff from the Holland Marsh agricultural area into the Holland River and Lake Simcoe by up to 85%. This project will provide a great benefit to all of us around Lake Simcoe. This phosphorus recycling facility should be treated as a separate project from the overall Upper York Sewage Scheme, which is paused. It would be a shame if that meant the phosphorus recycling facility was paused indefinitely too, because we need this project to deliver the benefits we know are necessary for the Lake, said Councillor Rob Nicol. Mayor Lynn Dollin said: "This is a no-brainer. This is gathering a lot of momentum and now is a good time." Innisfil Deputy Mayor Dan Davidson added: "Phosphorus levels are a main concern. This facility will work tremendously, and the impact will be astronomical. It will reduce a lot of algae that happens in the summer, and I am glad we are endorsing this." Proponents, including Jonathan Scott, Bradford West Gwillimbury councillor, met last week with the provincial Minister of the Environment, the Hon. David Piccini. The Minister, and York-Simcoe MPP the Hon. Caroline Mulroney, were clear they want to work together with all levels of government to deliver meaningful phosphorus reduction for Lake Simcoe as part of our shared commitments under the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan. "We were pleased with the meeting and their desire to work together," Scott said. Scott and his colleagues also met with senior officials at York Region as part of the extensive consultations before introducing the motions. "Given the unprecedented unity represented by area municipalities passing versions of these motions, we believe all levels of government are aligned behind the goal of delivering this facility," Scott said. "There are of course details to work out, but we are optimistic we can all deliver this win for the Lake. It is imperative that all levels of government work collaboratively to move this project forward. We cannot afford for political finger-pointing or posturing to get in the way of delivering this significant pollution reduction for Lake Simcoe and our watershed."